



3rd narrow defeat in a row for Salts

Epsom & Ewell 1-2 Balham. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Tuesday 3rd October 2023.

For the third time in eight days we found ourselves involved in a competitive and fairly even contest, but in all three matches we had to accept a single goal defeat. This loss, our seventh straight defeat in the League, confirms our third worst start to a season in club history after 1963/64 (11 losses) and 1970/71 (9 losses) and although we have been getting closer, further injuries in this match may well hurt us going forward into another big match at the weekend.

James Scott made three changes to the line up against Balham; a team with whom he was previously connected. At the back it was good to see our Captain Callum Wilson back on the field, with Nick Inwugwu reverting to the bench, while up front Marlon Pinder returned in place of the absent Tino Carpena and Sirak Negassi earned a start ahead of Ade Batula who was also amongst the substitutes. However, there weren't many others in the dug out with Ash Snadden still away following his wedding, while Kevin Espinosa was also absent for this match, so Alfie Wyld our physio was the only other person there!

Equally concerning are the numbers coming through the gates right now and just 50 were present for this match, while our club chose to produce no match tweets for this contest after a woefully brief set were produced on Saturday. The club really needs to publicise itself much better. If only there was someone out there who would be prepared to help with that, and yes, I have offered!

The match started at a frenetic pace and the visitors almost took the lead in the fourth minute when a shot from their number 11 came back off the underside of our bar and was cleared to safety. Unfortunately before we faced the corner we had to make a substitution after Ayran Kugathas had hurt his hamstring making an early run and he was replaced by Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez in just the sixth minute.

In response Pinder tried his luck from thirty yards having seen the keeper off his line, but the shot lacked the requisite height and was easily gathered. However, we were the authors of our own misfortune in the 21st minute after we pushed forward on the right, but a wayward pass was intercepted and with one pass James Adebayo was through on their left and he ran in from forty yards out and slotted the ball past Harvey Keogh for the opening goal.

We were back on terms within five minutes after good work on the left between Ethan Nelson-Roberts and Sirak Negassi resulted in a deep cross over to the far side where Ofosu-Hernandez was waiting and from just outside the area he struck a piledriver which the keeper did well to parry up into the air. However, as the ball fell to earth Negassi nipped in from a very narrow angle only a couple of yards out and knocked the ball across the goal into the far side netting for the equaliser. It was our first ever goal against Balham at the third attempt.

However, just as it looked like we had gained a foothold in the match we were behind again. Literally within thirty seconds of the kick off they broke straight through on goal and Tom Read knocked the ball past the exposed Keogh to restore the Balham lead at 2-1 in the 27th minute.

The game continued at a frantic pace with both teams pressing each other and covering a large amount of ground and we had a couple of half chances, firstly when Rory Edwards struck at goal and then when Ollie Thompson met a flicked on corner at the far post, but Edwards' shot was straight at the keeper while Thompson was at full stretch and couldn't keep the header on target.

We then suffered another injury after Wilson also injured his hamstring and Inwugwu came on for him. In fact it was Inwugwu who prevented a third goal for Balham in first half injury time with a brave saving challenge which was originally awarded as a corner, before it was pointed out to the referee that our man had been fouled in the process of making the clearance and eventually the free kick was awarded! However, we were still very much in this match as the teams went off for the break.

The second half started with a great piece of skill from Negassi who left one man on his backside, before being taken out by a high challenge from their 11. On a level of 0 being ground level and 10 being Jaevon Dyer v Wick, this was at least an eight, although the official decided that a yellow card was sufficient punishment. A few minutes later a shot on our goal was deflected and Keogh was out to collect before being flattened by Adebayo and again this was one of those cases where on another day we might have seen a red card, but leniency was again the outcome as only the yellow was produced.

The visitors had a shout for a penalty in the 68th minute but it wasn't given and the resultant shot went just wide of our goal. Tijani Eshilokun came on for his debut, having featured in pre-season and showed some good touches, but the match was becoming a midfield affair with few chances. The only real chance in this period of the match came with an outrageous attempt from nearly 40 yards that caught Keogh off his line and he had to recover very quickly to just claw the ball away from his goal line for a corner.

Eshilokun was unfortunate with a low curling shot that the visiting custodian was definitely concerned about, but the ball evaded



both him and his far post by a matter of inches and as time started to run out we then saw the Balham keeper drop the ball, only to be saved by the referee who saw some sort of foul in there, when there was none. Then in injury time it all boiled over in the final minutes of the match over on the touchline. It was hard to see exactly what happened but Pinder appeared to pick up a yellow card as did our Manager, along with the visitors Adebayo who then had to leave the field as it was his second of the night. However, he had already been subbed off by then so the visitors still finished the game with eleven men and after twelve minutes of added time had been played the final whistle confirmed another defeat for our boys.

There have been definite improvements in recent matches and there have also been a number of injuries too. None of our last three opponents could have complained had we come away with at least a point from any of these matches. However, time is running out as we approach our two most important matches of the season, against Colliers Wood United at home and Sandhurst Town away. Defeats to these two clubs will leave us well adrift of the rest of the League, and it is essential that we can have as many fit men as possible for these encounters. A bit of support would be nice too please. Come on down!

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Ayran Kugathas, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Ollie Thompson ©, Zach Powell, Callum Wilson, George Owusu, Rory Edwards, Marlon Pinder, Thompson Adeyemi, Sirak Negassi

Subs: Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez for Kugathas (6), Nick Inwugwu for Wilson (35), Tijani Eshilokun for Thompson (70), Ade Batula for Owusu (76), Jaan Stanley for Negassi (81)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Sutton and Epsom's Alley of dreams dashed in the end.

Old Alleynians 29 Sutton & Epsom RFC 25. Saturday 30th September.

For Sutton and Epsom supporters with good memories, and multiple miles on the clock, they will recall opening three consecutive league campaigns from 1989-90 onwards against Old Alleynians. However, 3rd November 2012, in S&E's league winning season, was the last time that the two teams met at Dulwich Common with the hosts shading it 18-17. For Saturday's clash the Black & Whites welcomed back wingers Kyren Ghumra and Robbie Martey which meant that the Rugby Lane team no longer resembled Alf Ramsey's World Cup winners. It was another thrilling chapter in the story of this season with Old Alleynians triumphing 29-25.

Freddy Bunting kicked off in front of a miniscule crowd, no doubt affected by the rail strike, making the very busy roads in the environs even more congested. Thankfully the numbers grew throughout the afternoon and they were rewarded with an exhilarating game. A perfectly flighted kick descended just outside the host's 22 and was followed by a resolute Jack Benton tackle. OAs went wide but conceded a penalty. Freddy Bunting accepted the opportunity to give his team the early 3-0 lead.

The host's reply was instantaneous. The first of many sumptuous offloads by the Alleynians had them invading the visitor's 22 and a kick ahead gave them an attacking lineout. With clinical efficiency hooker Rory Simpson forced his way over for the first try of the game. Henry Dewing's touchline conversion went awry but OAs were 5-3 up.

Sutton & Epsom were equally rapid in their riposte. Declining a penalty shot at goal they went in search of the premium points with a kick to the corner with the attacking lineout to follow. Matt Whitaker secured the throw and the S&E pack was initially halted but a second surge carried Josh Glanville over the line for a very similar score to their opponents. Captain Bunting made light of the kick from the flank to restore Sutton's lead to 10-5. Old Alleynians pressed hard for the next score. Their swarming defence and high tempo game pressured the Rugby Lane team into errors. The visitors survived a charged down in their 22 but later a mistimed lineout created a turnover with fatal consequences. The home team ruthlessly exploited an overlap for Will Malins to score the first of his trio of tries. Henry Dewing bisected the uprights to put the Dulwich-based club into a 12-10 lead. As the first quarter ended OAs, tighthead prop Tom Weightman offered sagely advice to his teammates at the restart: "Boys they cannot exit let's play territory".

Within five minutes it looked as if OAs were about to extend their lead from a 5-metre lineout. Defiant defence stopped the advancing forwards and when it went wide a desperate grasp from Michael Bennion prevented the backs applying the coup de grâce. From the ensuing scrum a stunning break from Matt Whitaker supported by Kyren Ghumra took play into the host's half. A penalty for a high tackle was advanced to the 22. Superb play saw Kyren Ghumra to 5 metres out but Jack Howes in support could not hold on to the pass with the undefended line awaiting him. The error was not costly as the Black & White pack won a penalty at the scrum. Opting for tap penalty from 5 metres George London got to within a metre before transferring the ball to Chris Farrell to score. The conversion hit the post but Sutton led 15-12.

Old Alleynians then dominated the remainder of the first period with two tries in the last ten minutes. The first score was Will



Malins' second as he got the ball in space and finished with pace and power in the corner. Though the conversion failed the lead had changed hands once more with OAs 17-15 to the good. With the wind in their sails the southeast Londoners were soon pressing for another score. Desperate defence held up the hosts over the line. The goal-line drop out was taken by the hosts who laid siege to the Sutton line. A diving Ghumra interception denied a try but soon after Will Malins turned provider with a wonderful offload to create a try for Number 8 Tom Grahamslaw. Henry Dewing concluded the first period with his second conversion of the afternoon for a 24-15 lead. The teams turned around with a bonus point already secure in Old Alleynians' back pocket for the four fabulous first half tries.

The contest resumed, the tempo increased and the chances to score multiplied exponentially. Quite remarkably there followed thirty minutes of end-to-end rugby with numerous chances but no additional scores. As one matchday photographer mused both XVs were specialising in try avoidance. The catalogue of close calls began with that man Malins once more to the fore. The Sutton defence dawdled by the touchline and the winger manufactured a kick ahead and from nothing the ball was rolling over the try-line with a couple of Alleynians vying for the glory. However, they were denied by the diving Sutton lock Josh Glanville, who used every inch of his frame, to rescue S&E. A few minutes later Kyren Ghumra was sprinting clear in the wide open spaces with a try beckoning before his errant pass sailed high into touch. Then OAs pounced on a ball dropped by the visitors and a breakaway score looked a certainty. But a backpedalling Bunting and Bennion prevented the dramatic score.

Sutton's cause was not aided when Matt Whitaker departed for a yellow card as a result of cumulative offences. Old Alleynians kicked into the corner hoping to immediately take advantage of their numerical superiority. The ball was claimed and spun wide but white-line fever overwhelmed fullback Henry Dewing and Rob Hegarty scythed him down a metre short with expectant support on the outside. Sutton then took over the 'nearly but not quite' mantle. Reminiscent of the denouement of the Battersea game the previous round they hammered against the line under the posts. Herculean heroics by the SE21 outfit forced S&E to seek the alternative route via the backs. They were denied by a marvellous cover tackle on Kyren Ghumra in the corner. After all the thrills and spills the next score was the much more mundane Bunting penalty to reduce the Old Alleynians' lead to 24-18.

Hardly had the crowd had time to digest that Sutton and Epsom were within a score before they rose to applaud Will Malins' hat trick. It was another excellent finish and a deserved reward for an outstanding performance on the wing. Though the conversion missed with the lead 29-18 with only a couple of minutes remaining of normal time it appeared to be the match-winning moment. However, the Black & Whites were not done and we were able to bear witness to another episode of their long-running Soap "Life On The Opposition Line". The Alleynian defence had been robust all game and were eager for another titanic tussle under their posts. After very careful consideration following numerous carries the referee awarded S&E a try. Chris Farrell emerged from the pile of bodies to claim his second of the afternoon.

Freddy Bunting's simple conversion meant Sutton trailed 25-29 creating a chaotic conclusion. Both sides decided to run the ball at every opportunity. Henry Dewing thought he had finally shut the door on the impertinent opponents when he chipped ahead but the bounce did not favour him and the game was still in the balance.

Though Sutton and Epsom threw the ball from one side to the other they could make little headway against the voracious tackling of the Alleynians. With time up OAs gratefully kicked the ball from the paddock at their first opportunity to collect a thoroughly deserved bonus point win. The Malins hat trick was the obvious highlight but the Old Alleynian XV were excellent with lock Ben Osuntokun epitomising their performance. The Number 4 secured lineout possession, carried to great effect in the loose and was prominent in defence. For S&E they probably created more chances than in any other game this season but could not find that cutting edge. Kyren Ghumra was a tad ring rusty in his first outing of the season but was still a prominent threat. The hosts were good value for their win as they managed to play at a faster tempo, were aggressive in defence and kept attacks going with dextrous offloads and excellent support running.

The league has a weekend off before resuming on Saturday 14th October when Medway visit Rugby Lane to resume hostilities in this most competitive of leagues.

Sutton & Epsom: Michael Bennion, Kyren Ghumra, Ciaran Mohr, Freddy Bunting ©, Robbie Martey, Gareth O'Brien, Chris Ballard, Will Lloyd, Jack Howes, Callum Gibson, Jack Benton, Josh Glanville, George London, Rob Hegarty & Matt Whitaker.

Replacements: (all used) Tariq Al Khaldi, Chris Farrell & Ross Parsons.

Old Alleynians Henry Dewing, Will Malins, Will Foster, Robert Outram, Tom Vogel, Andrew Jones-Davies, Tristram Holden, Richard Garrett, Rory Simpson, Tom Weightman, Ben Osuntokun, Will Hinchcliffe, Chris Thatcher, Tyreece Asamoah, Tom Grahamslaw.

Replacements: (all used) Charles Thompson, James Mair & Tom Williams.

Image: Old Alleynian forward in another match C. Old Alleynian RFC website



Not quite a “veni, vidi, vici” victory for Romans

Tadley Calleva 1-0 Epsom & Ewell FC. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 30th September 2023.

Ultimately our latest match was decided by a clinical Kieran Rodgers finish from an errant and arguably unnecessary Ollie Thompson pass in the 40th minute. However, this doesn't tell the full story here as a resolute Epsom side more than held their own in this match and were most definitely worth a point against a Tadley side that had scored twelve goals in the last week.

In fact the **Romans**, so named because of the old Roman settlement of Silchester just down the road, probably thought this would be a fairly easy day at the office after their heavy FA Vase win on Saturday followed by a five goal romp against Sheerwater, who of course, we failed to beat two weeks ago. However that would not prove to be the case here as our boys ensured this would become a tight and competitive encounter between two evenly matched sides.

Many of our regulars were missing once again, although Zach Powell did return after a few games unavailable. He probably thought he would be eased in after being named on the bench, but an injury to Reece Tierney in the warm up forced our Manager's hand and left us with only four other substitutes for the match. Additionally, Marlon Pinder and Sirak Negassi were absent and so Tino Carpena and Ade Batula came back into the starting line up, as did Ethan Nelson-Roberts at the expense of Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez with Ayran Kugathas moving from the left to his more regular position out on the right.

We started brightly and took the game to our hosts in the opening stages. George Owusu had a near post cross cut out from a dangerous position and then in the sixth minute Carpena set up Ade Batula for a low shot from the edge off the penalty area that took a slight deflection on its way and made the save by Tadley keeper Craig Atkinson even more special as he stuck out a right glove to keep it out when it threatened to creep under him. Atkinson has played against us on numerous occasions previously for Cove and Hartley Wintney amongst others and always performs well against us.

We forced another couple of half-chances as we continued to display the attacking threat from Tuesday's League Cup match, but the home side gradually began to find a way around us and created a couple of opportunities of their own. Harvey Keogh dealt with the first of these fairly comfortably, although with the second, a weak punch nearly cost us as the ball fell for a Tadley striker whose shot was on target but blocked by Thompson Adeyemi amid futile shouts for handball.

We attacked again and Thompson's far post header was on target but claimed easily by Atkinson, but we then had to defend for a few minutes after Powell cut his knee and was forced to leave the pitch for treatment and if we had conceded from one ball across the area, it would have been hard to swallow as I couldn't see why the referee wasn't allowing our man back on. Neal tried his luck from thirty yards as the home team seemed to be running out of ideas, but our set pieces weren't any better with many deliveries either not getting past the first man, or way beyond all our players. We did have a good chance just after the half hour when a Nick Inwugwu ball towards the far post resulted in two defenders going for the same ball, which then fell kindly for Carpena, but his shot lacked real power and was easily claimed by Atkinson.

Next to try his luck was Nelson-Roberts whose corner was returned back to him out on the right, from where he cut in and struck at goal, but he missed the target with better options waiting in the centre.

It was beginning to look like a frustrating day for both teams when out of nowhere we conceded. Thompson out on the left played the ball square to where he thought Powell would be, only to give the ball straight to Rodgers who ran in on goal and gave Keogh no chance in the 41st minute. It nearly became two in first half injury time with a smart shot on the turn from Fragata, but Keogh was down well to turn the ball away as it was creeping inside his left hand post otherwise. Half time came with no one on either team particularly happy with the situation.

We made a change at the half with Jaan Stanley coming on in his favoured number ten position for Inwugwu as we reverted to a 4-3-3 which looked more like a 4-2-1-3 personally, and we had a good chance in the 48th minute when a ball across from Kugathas found Batula at the far post, but it was on his weaker left foot and he barely made contact; the ball dribbling through to Atkinson from six yards out. Then we were back on the defensive as Rodgers got through on their left but Keogh stood up well and made a good save from the close range strike. The game swung from end to end and Carpena and Stanley saw shots blocked in quick succession and then Kiyu Brown came on for Carpena and Stanley was moved from the “ten” to the centre-forward role after just twenty minutes.

Ofosu-Hernandez came on for Kugathas with fifteen minutes remaining and it was interesting to note that both he and Nelson-Roberts advanced more in this match when we were playing four at the back than they had in recent games where they had been wing backs! Still, we only really created half chances, the best of which came when Ofosu-Hernandez sent a deep cross over and Owusu jumped high to claim the header but couldn't keep it on target.



In the 92nd minute Keogh stood tall again as he made a fine save, but we were unable to breach the opposition's defences and had to accept our sixth straight League defeat. There have been signs of improvement in the last couple of games, but it is a little concerning that, Pinder apart, we haven't seen any other new signings yet, as all of our other players have been at the club since the start of the season. We now enter a potentially pivotal three game stretch against teams at our end of the table as Balham and Colliers Wood United come to us before we go to Sandhurst Town a week later. On the evidence of the last two performances we should still have hope, but the fixtures get noticeably more difficult on paper after those, so it's now time for us to start picking up points or we will have a mountain to climb otherwise.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Ayran Kugathas, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Ollie Thompson ©, Zach Powell, Nick Inwugwu, George Owusu, Rory Edwards, Tino Carpena, Thompson Adeyemi, Ade Batula

Subs: Jaan Stanley for Inwugwu (HT), Kiyu Brown for Carpena (66), Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez (74)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

"Veni, vidi, vici" means "I came, I saw, I conquered" - attributed to Julius Caesar and refers to a swift and conclusive victory.

Epsom and Ewell's 3 - 1 lead lost in 12 minutes

Epsom & Ewell 3-4 AFC Croydon Athletic. Combined Counties League Cup - First Round Tuesday 26th September 2023.

A devastating three goal swing in just twelve minutes enabled AFC Croydon Athletic to pinch a 4-3 win in this First Round League Cup tie at the Madgwick after we had led 3-1 and been very good value for that lead for 75 minutes.

And it's such a shame because that first 75 minutes of the match was most definitely our most aggressive and threatening of the entire season as we shrugged off the fact that a number of regulars were missing from this match and took the game to our visitors from the start.

The unavailable list contained Callum Wilson, Zach Powell, Chester Clothier, Ash Snadden, Tommy Williams, Kiyu Brown and Ethan Nelson-Roberts, but this opened the door for a number of players who hadn't had the chance to stake a claim for a place recently and Sirak Negassi and George Owusu both made strong claims for a starting place on Saturday with energetic performances. Ollie Thompson became our fourth Captain of the season and Nick Inwugwu came in alongside him and Reece Tierney, while Jabari Owusu-Hernandez and Ayran Kugathas both came in at the wing back positions.

Only 47 spectators were present to witness a match which would prove to be very good entertainment for a neutral and within a minute we had attacked with Ofosu-Hernandez sending an early strike over the bar from 20 yards. Then Thompson Adeyemi nearly got through with a clever piece of skill, only to be robbed at the last second. This didn't deter us and a ball over to the left found Negassi whose shot back across goal was well saved at full stretch by Oshane Brown's left leg. Brown had played for us twice back in 2014 when we needed emergency cover for a pair of FA Cup ties against Croydon, although when he was reminded about this, he couldn't remember. I suppose it was a few years back!

We continued to attack and Negassi saw his shot half blocked across the field to Owusu, but his side footed strike skipped just beyond the far post from around 15 yards, and in all honesty he probably should have at least hit the target. In response to this point, the visitors had just one strike over the bar from distance by Kamara. Then in the 20th minute Negassi was bundled over by McCarthy who picked up a yellow card for the challenge. Rory Edwards took the free kick and struck the ball at the wall, where it hit an arm and the referee awarded a penalty. Marlon Pinder stepped up to send Brown the wrong way in the 22nd minute and we were ahead.

Things got better in the 32nd minute as a great crossfield ball found Negassi who ran in and simply slotted the ball past the advancing Brown to put us two goals up. There was a suspicion of offside about the goal and there was certainly some protest by the visitors, but the goal stood. However, what next? Well, regrettably just as we needed to see out the half, Inwugwu brought the ball out of defence, but was robbed by Mal Thomas who simply ran in from thirty yards and drew Harvey Keogh out before then clipping the ball past him from close range to reduce the arrears in the 40th minute.

In a sign of things to come later in the match we got a little twitchy in the final few minutes of the half, as if we didn't know whether to go back on the attack, or try to hold on to what we had. However, we survived and went in at the break 2-1 up. Then with just 56 ticks of the second half played we restored the two goal advantage again with a pass to Negassi on the left and his left-footed cross was perfect for Owusu to head back across Brown and into the corner of the net from six yards. Moments later



Owusu was inches wide with another shot, but it didn't seem to matter as we were well on top at this point.

Negassi sent another ball across goal that had both Pinder and Owusu stretching to reach it unsuccessfully, before Tierney suffered an injury and he was replaced by Jude Aikins-Hawkson at the back, making his debut for the club. Pinder made way soon after as Tino Carpena came on and then in the 74th minute Negassi was substituted. His replacement Jaan Stanley was flagged offside just as he produced a good finish from an angle with almost his first touch but we were still in charge.

Until the 76th minute, that is. It was hard to see exactly what happened, but a visiting player went down in our penalty area and a spot kick was awarded. Haile Richardson struck the ball away confidently and within seconds he was denied another by a superb close range save by Keogh. However, with the score at 3-2 and despite our dominance to this point, we suddenly seemed to go into our shell and the Rams took full advantage of this with a sweeping move from left to right that was finished off with a low shot under Keogh from Oriogun in the 84th minute. Brown asked us behind the goal if we would go straight to penalties at the 90 minute mark; which would have been the case, but we didn't manage to hold out that long, as a break on the left with just two minutes of normal time to play resulted in Keogh coming out of his goal but failing to gather and the ball across goal was then forced in from close range at the second attempt by Phillips for what would prove to be the winning goal.

We put on a couple more substitutes but the damage was done and despite the five minutes of extra time we fashioned just one more chance, earning a free kick right on the edge that Adeyemi sent high out of the ground. Our Cup hopes went with it and the whistle blew a minute later.

I am absolutely certain that we would have won this match had our recent form been better, but it almost seemed as if we froze within sight of a winning line we hadn't seen for a while, and having defended so well for such long periods in recent games, it was bit of a shock to fall apart as we did near the end. However, this level of football is relentless and unforgiving and we now have to dust ourselves down rapidly for the trip to Tadley on Saturday. This was, in my opinion, a vast improvement on anything we had seen all season from an attacking point of view and I actually saw glimmers of hope in this match, but we are going to have to be more clinical when holding the ascendancy in a match, or those glimmers won't count for many points.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez, Ayran Kugathas, Nick Inwugwu, Ollie Thompson (c), Reece Tierney, George Owusu, Rory Edwards, Marlon Pinder, Thompson Adeyemi, Sirak Negassi

Subs: Jude Aikins-Hawkson for Tierney (57), Tino Carpena for Pinder (65), Jaan Stanley for Negassi (74), Ade Batula for Owusu (89), Ben Bauchop for Edwards (89)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Bunting Boots Battersea Into Touch

Sutton & Epsom 26 Battersea Ironsides 25, Saturday 23rd September. This was the first time the two clubs had ever met in a league fixture as Battersea Ironsides became league opponent number 104 at Rugby Lane on Saturday. Once more the Black & Whites were set against an unbeaten side and on this occasion they entertained the league leaders. The hosts gave a debut to fullback Luca Shaw whilst the visitors, not for the first time this campaign, made a host of changes to the squad who had downed London Cornish the previous Saturday. S&E turned the early season form guide on its head with a dramatic 26-25 victory.

After the recent torrid temperatures it was a welcome return to sensible weather that was most conducive to entertaining rugby. Freddy Bunting set the game in motion and within five minutes the Ironsides had taken the lead. A solid lineout in the 22 was followed by a penetrative carry by lock Jack Wharton before captain Stuart released the backs and winger Ben Turner applied the coup de grâce. The conversion from the flank drifted wide as Battersea led 5-0. Five minutes later and the visitors had doubled their lead. A stunning break from a ruck on halfway by blindside Raphael Arboine was snuffed out by a splendid cover tackle deep in the S&E 22 but the damage had been done. The ball was recycled and spun wide for Ben Turner to dot down once more. Another challenging conversion from Charles Stuart failed as Battersea Ironsides were 10-0 ahead in as many minutes.

The league leaders were content that the natural order was being maintained as they appeared to be on their way to a regulation bonus point victory condemning the Black & Whites to another demoralising defeat. However, perhaps there should be a pitch-side sign at Rugby Lane declaring: "BEWARE OF THE BUNTING". An illegal side entry to a ruck offered the Sutton skipper his first shot at goal. He duly obliged to put S&E on the board at 3-10. A few minutes later he was caressing the ball through the uprights again for 6-10 to conclude the first quarter. The second penalty being awarded for a deliberate knock on after a fine break by Matt Whitaker. The men from Burntwood Lane responded as outside centre Jacob Charles carved through the home defences and with a modicum more of precision a try would have ensued. Moments later his centre partner Ben Lyons held on to



the ball too long and another chance disappeared over the horizon.

The SW17 outfit's progress was already being hampered by the regular blasts from referee Richardson's whistle. The sight of the referee shooing back the Battersea offenders the obligatory ten metres as if they were recalcitrant hens was becoming a regular feature of the game. Almost inevitably Freddy Bunting was given another opportunity to add to his account but failed to reduce the deficit on the half hour. The hosts rang the changes with Will Lloyd replacing Callum Gibson in the front row and Jack Benton taking over from Ewan McTaggart in the second row. The remainder of the half saw more probing kicking from both XVs as if they had signed a non-aggression pact putting security ahead of ambition. In time added on, normal service was resumed as Freddy Bunting bisected the uprights for the third time as S&E trailed 9-10. There was just enough time on the clock for the visitors to also have a shot at goal. Charles Stuart kept his head and landed his penalty from near the halfway line to conclude the first period with Battersea Ironsides 13-9 to the good.

As the sides turned around a fascinating contest was evenly poised. The early dominance of the visitors had been undermined by indiscipline as they threw around penalties like confetti and failed to heed the impassioned plea of 'cut out the penalties' from within their ranks. S&E grew into the game via a solid scrum and keeping it tight with the forwards carrying to good effect to counteract the threat of the Battersea backs in open play.

The Black & Whites started the second half in fine style. An early infringement saw Freddy Bunting kick to the 22. An excellent catch and drive was followed by Matt Whitaker carrying to within five metres of the line forcing a scrum to Sutton under the posts. The resilient Battersea defence held the line until Sutton were awarded a penalty try when prop Will Lloyd was illegally prevented from collecting his annual score. The hosts now led by 16-13. In adversity the Ironsides made the perfect riposte. Probing kicks from Charles Stuart pegged the hosts in their 22 and put the visitors onto the front foot. Then more incisive running by Charles Jacobs had S&E on the retreat as centre partner Ben Lyons was on hand to shrug off challengers for an excellent finish in the corner. Despite the conversion failing Charles Stuart's side had seen the restoration of their lead as the scoreboard read 18-16 to Battersea Ironsides.

With an unpleasant echo of last Saturday's match against Old Reigatian the opposition tries were like London buses and Battersea secured a bonus point for their fourth try a minute later. Capitalising on the bouncing ball from an up and under the Openview side tore into the Sutton 22 and scrum half Jack Moates dived over. Charles Stuart gratefully accepted the easier conversion to extend the lead to 25-16. In a blink of an eye the Rugby Lane crowd, who had been contemplating a first win of the season, were now dreading a fourth defeat on the spin. As the game entered the final quarter so the action switched to the visitors' 22. Despite pressure and territory the hosts had to be content with another Freddy Bunting penalty to be within a score at 19-25.

With only seven minutes remaining the men in green ventured into Black & White territory and were given a penalty. Following the prevailing orthodoxy the pot at goal was declined in favour of the kick towards the corner. In hindsight, Charles Stuart's decision might have been a tad cavalier as a successful kick would have translated to a nine-point lead. Fortune did not favour the bold as they were undone by conceding their umpteenth penalty. In time added on a collapsed scrum gave Freddy Bunting the chance to kick to the corner for S&E to have a shot at glory. There followed 5 minutes of unrelenting assault on the Battersea line, heroic defence and unbearable tension with penalties and scrums as the action concentrated under the posts. Finally, a mass of bodies slumped over the line and jubilant Sutton players thrust their arms skyward. Mr Richardson took a considered look and finally raised his arm aloft for Rob Hegarty's try. It was left to Freddy Bunting to add the conversion that was greeted with rapturous applause and the final whistle as Sutton won 26-25.

Battersea Ironsides had the ideal start with a quick-fire Ben Turner brace of tries. Their lineout, whether on their ball or against the Sutton throw, was excellent. Centre Charles Jacobs was a threat every time he had the ball. Captain Charles Stuart varied the attack from 10 but ultimately they were let down by their discipline. The profligate penalty count spread like a contagion and not only cost them 12 points, but also hefty yardage and time spent with 14 men.

The Black & Whites showed character in bucketfuls coming back from the dire start and then overturning the 9-point deficit that culminated with the nail-biting denouement. For Sutton the pack was a source of great strength in the set-piece and the loose, Matt Whitaker was a giant in attack and defence whilst Freddy Bunting kept the scoreboard ticking over.

Next Saturday the Black & Whites visit newly promoted Old Alleynians for the first time since November 2012. The OAs have had a solid start to the campaign lying sixth in the table after wins over Gravesend and Sidcup.

Sutton & Epsom:

Luca Shaw, Jack Briggs, Ciaran Mohr, Freddy Bunting ©, Max Russell, Gareth O'Brien, Chris Ballard, Tom Boaden, Jack Howes, Callum Gibson, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, George London, Rob Hegarty & Matt Whitaker. Replacements: (all used) Will Lloyd, Chris Farrell & Jack Benton.



Battersea Ironsides:

Jack Winch, Ben Turner, Charles Jacobs, Ben Lyons, Charlie Craig, Charles Stuart, Jack Moates, Sam Chetwynd, Harry Vigar, Harry Batstone, Jack Wharton, Max Trickett, Raph Arboine, Alex Chitan, Charlie Horrell. Replacements: (all used) Jonny Newsham, George Williams & Billy Diamond.

Shoot-out ends Salt's Vase season

Bearsted 1-1 Epsom & Ewell FC. Bearsted won 4-1 on penalties. Isuzu F.A. Vase - Second Qualifying Round Saturday 23rd September 2023.

A rather disappointing penalty shoot out, the twelfth in our history, ultimately sealed our exit from the F.A. Vase this season. However, much like the F.A. Cup defeat at Eastbourne, we had looked like going out with a whimper until Captain Callum Wilson pulled us level again as the match finished 1-1 after the ninety minutes was complete.

On the face of it, a draw against a team that are well placed in the Southern Counties East is not a bad result and had this been a League match, we'd probably have been more than happy with a point, but we were unable to take advantage of the Wilson equaliser and what was actually our second worst statistically of the seven shoot outs we have lost, ensured that the correct team went through to the next round.

We made three changes to the line up following the defeat at home to Sheerwater. Up front we had Marlon Pinder who returned to the club in midweek and he came in for Tino Carpena, while Wilson returned at the back in place of Nick Inwugwu and Rory Edwards also came into the starting eleven in place of Chester Clothier.

On a perfect playing surface the opening exchanges were mostly in favour of the home side. Harvey Keogh was in action early to keep out a shot from an angle with his legs before Reece Tierney picked up an early and somewhat harsh yellow card, which was probably given because of the theatrical tumble as it was only fractionally late. On the quarter hour the Bears had a good opportunity but Joel Wakefield sent his strike over the bar from just inside the penalty area.

The home side continued to press and a decent attempt from Jordan Tingley went over Keogh's head, but was wide of the goal and the danger was cleared. Then Wilson made a good block for a corner and from this, there was a concerted appeal for a handball, which certainly had me worried, but the referee wasn't interested and as we broke, Jaan Stanley was brought down, earning Alfie Sanders a yellow card for the home team. Wilson was in action again soon after as he made a fine block from Tingley and as we approached the half another Bearsted corner was headed over by the unmarked Ryan Blake.

The final action of the half was a rare Epsom attack as Tommy Williams found Ade Batula on the left, but his ball across goal was cut out by Frankie Leonard in the Bears goal. In fact we had the first chance of the second half too as a Williams corner was headed clear under pressure from Tierney at the far post, but in the 55th minute we went behind as a good pass in from the left to Ollie Freeman enabled him to square the ball for Tingley to finish from close range.

This had been coming and as with other recent matches it was looking as though we had a mountain to climb. Pinder had a good opportunity from an Ethan Nelson-Roberts left wing cross but his headed contact was minimal and the ball went across goal instead of at it. Our "new" man put in a decent shift and will get better as he regains fitness, but his service was sadly lacking in this match. Even our wing backs, who had provided the best opportunities in recent weeks were not getting forwards as often as they used to; something I feel we need to address if we are to provide more of an attacking threat.

Carpena came on after 66 minutes and looked lively. He was involved in our equaliser five minutes later as Batula did well on the right wing before laying the ball back for Stanley to deliver into Carpena who then knocked the ball on for Wilson, standing around the edge of the penalty area to drive low and hard past Leonard, who got a glove to it, but was never going to keep it out. Without a doubt this was against the run of play and would prove to be our only shot on target, but we'll take anything we can get right now! With our heads up we started to ask more questions and Batula tried his luck from 25 yards, only to see his shot blocked by a defender. Then in the 87th minute Carpena slipped his man and got through, running in on goal from about 40 yards out, but Blake was there to make a crucial tackle just outside the area and our chance was gone. Nelson-Roberts then found Kiyoo Brown in the final moments but his shot was also blocked for a corner by a defender.

The home side struck a free kick over the bar during the five minutes of injury time, but the final whistle ensured we would go to penalties. Regrettably we had just taken off our regular penalty taker in Stanley and didn't really turn up for the spot kicks. With Bearsted electing to go first, Phil Headley, Ollie Freeman, Will Johnson-Cole and Blake all scored, rendering their fifth penalty unnecessary as Carpena and Williams both saw their weak kicks saved by Leonard. Wilson netted his penalty in between the two



saves, but when Blake's fourth penalty went straight through Keogh it was all over for another year.

There were some positives. Despite missing Ash Snadden and Zach Powell at the back we looked a lot more solid than we had against Sheerwater, but the real concern here is that we are having to do too much defending right now and need to find a way to take the pressure off of our back line for greater periods. Pinder will improve options up front if we can get better service to him, but we now face matches against AFC Croydon Athletic (League Cup) who scored six this day before we travel to Tadley Calleva who hit seven. Neither will be lacking in form or confidence when they face us.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Tommy Williams, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Callum Wilson (c), Ollie Thompson, Reece Tierney, Ade Batula, Rory Edwards, Marlon Pinder, Thompson Adeyemi, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Nick Inwugwu for Thompson (62), Tino Carpena for Pinder (66), Kiyo Brown for Stanley (84)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Close result in match of fluctuating fortunes

The Black and White bandwagon descended Saturday 16th upon the Geoffrey Knight Fields for the third round of the Regional 2 South East season. Old Reigatian (OR) are one of three clubs, along with London Cornish and Old Alleynians, who crossed Sutton and Epsom's path during their brief dalliance with Level 7 in 2012-13. For Rugby Lane supporters of a certain vintage there was a link to the club's former glory. The OR captain was Reilly Franklin-Talbot the son of erstwhile Sutton Number 8 Sean who, amongst many Herculean deeds, scored the last gasp try in the 1990 Surrey Cup final to defeat Old Mid-Whitgiftians by 16-11. Now returning to the present from some rose-tinted nostalgia, the hosts had begun the year with impressive wins over Sidcup and London Cornish in sharp contrast to the suburbanites' start. The early form guide was just maintained as OR edged past the visitors 35-29 in a game of fluctuating fortunes.

On another glorious summer afternoon, that had a refreshing breeze that was more sympathetic to the travails of the participants than last weekend's cauldron, the crowd gathered to revel in an afternoon made for running rugby. Freddy Bunting's lofted kick off was superbly tapped back by Michael Davies to initiate an opening period of Sutton control. Following multiple phases and profitable probing by Sutton and Epsom they were awarded a penalty. Freddy Bunting did the necessary and Sutton led 3-0. The Black and Whites returned to the OR 22 looking to build on their early advantage but in a crowded midfield Reigatian centre Tom Allen made a timely intervention to intercept and race away to score under the posts. The unchallenging offering was accepted by Conor Woods as the home crowd applauded their 7-3 lead after an enthralling eight minutes.

An accidental, but avoidable, offside by Sutton and Epsom gave the Reigate team the opportunity to test the visitors' defence as they kicked into the 22. The defence stood firm and won a scrummage that enabled them to exit via Chris Ballard's boot. However, a kick is only as good as its chase. A pitiful challenge encouraged a wonderful counter and in the blink of an eye a try looked to be a certainty until a crucial pass hit the deck with the line at the mercy of OR who compounded their misery by giving away a penalty. Their disappointment was assuaged within scrum they deservedly scored. The backs created the overlap for flanker Finlay Lock to apply the coup de grâce. A sweetly struck conversion by Conor Woods made it 14-3.

The Old Reigatian backs were in full swing and it was a thrilling sight to behold. The combination of pace, evasive footwork and wonderful passing was devastating. In addition, the ubiquitous flanker Finlay Lock linked play with deft touches and was supported ably by captain Reilly Franklin-Talbot's powerful carrying. Attacking once more this potent potion for success was denied on the line by a Will Lloyd tackle. This was only a temporary stay of execution as OR scored from the 5-metre scrum. Winger Max Coyle stood up the defence and stepped past would be tacklers to finish with aplomb. Conor Woods bisected the uprights and the unstoppable Old Reigatian XV had an impressive and deserved 21-3 lead.

Sutton and Epsom tinkered with their front row as Tom Boaden was replaced by Tariq Al Khaldi. Then five minutes later the Sutton pack was forced into another change when Number 8 Kean Orchard injured his knee and the visitors brought Dan Jones off the bench. The Black and Whites now employed the boot to great effect. Firstly, a Bunting kick forced a drop out then an O'Brien effort set up a lineout in the 22. A jinking run by Gareth O'Brien had the hosts in retreat. The Sutton pack recycled the ball and George London forced his way over. Captain Bunting added the extras to cut the lead to 21-10. The next opportunity to add to the score went to the home team.

However, the Rugby Lane men resolutely defended a 5-metre line and the timely intervention of centre Ross Parsons won the visitors a relieving penalty. At the other end the Black and Whites were awarded a penalty and, in a rare demonstration of fallibility, Freddy Bunting's kick drifted by on the crosswind. The kicking machine returned to working order when the Sutton



skipper slotted over his next opportunity that concluded the first period with Old Reigatian 21-13 to the good.

Within five minutes of the restart Freddy Bunting had reduced the deficit to 5 points with his third penalty of the afternoon. Sutton were playing with control and with astute application of their kicking game. The key to their improving fortunes was the set scrum as Messrs Al Khaldi, Howes and Lloyd were utterly dominant. Indeed it was from a scrum that Sutton and Epsom took the lead.

The Black and White pack marched back their opponents by 10 metres in a ruthless demonstration of power and control. Michael Davies took advantage of the back-peddling defence and the visitors were halted on the line. Sutton were not to be denied and hooker Jack Howes was able to reach over to score. Bunting's conversion put Sutton ahead by 23-21. They had overturned the 18-point margin by starving the Reigatian team of possession.

Sutton and Epsom extended their lead when the scrum was awarded a penalty in front of the posts and Freddy Bunting chipped it over to stretch the lead to 26-21. OR awoke from their slumber in startling fashion. From the restart Chris Ballard cleared to the host's half and the ball was gathered by Max Coyle who set off on a scything run that exploited Sutton's poor cover. Scrum half Alex Skinner was on hand to finish off the sweeping move and Conor Woods added the simplest of conversions. Reinvigorated by regaining the lead at 28-26, with a bonus point in the bank, OR's struck again moments later. Skipper Reilly Franklin-Talbot marauded into the 22 and passed to winger Harrison Mitchell who dotted down. Conor Woods made it five conversions from five attempts as Old Reigatian led 35-26 as the game entered the final quarter.

Sutton and Epsom were soon gifted a way back into the game with a penalty in front of the posts. However, Chris Ballard took a quick tap penalty trying to exploit the defensive disarray. The gamble did not go to glory and the Reigate men survived. Soon after a wonderful chance to extend their lead was butchered when centre Tom Allen's passing let him down following his brilliant break that denied the home crowd a third try in a devastating ten minute spell. With the game in time added on Dan Jones was manhandled at the breakdown and Sutton and Epsom had a penalty. This time the points were taken to give the visitors a potential losing bonus point as the lead was reduced to 35-29. A minute later the Rugby Lane supporters were crestfallen when Old Reigatian were awarded a penalty in front of the posts. The previously perfect Conor Woods erred and the score remained the same. Despite frantic efforts from the Black and Whites there was no eleventh hour drama and the game concluded moments later with OR triumphant by 35-29.

Old Reigatian's backs played some thrilling rugby on a perfect day in the wonderful setting of the Geoffrey Knight Fields. In addition, the tireless Finlay Lock excelled on the flank as OR outscored Sutton and Epsom by five goals to two. In a game of contrasting styles the hosts certainly monopolised the highlights package but there are many ways to flay a feline. The Sutton pack with Tariq Al Khaldi making a most significant contribution off the bench made it an intriguing contest.

With 19 points from the bludgeoning Bunting boot the game could have gone either way. For the visitors there were improvements from the previous outing. Ross Parsons in the centres epitomised the improved work at the breakdown. Jack Howes at hooker had a 100% record with his lineout throwing. However, the garlands are reserved for the fabulous front row who created the platform from which all their success came.

Old Reigatian remain unbeaten, second in the table on points difference having garnered the maximum 15 from their three matches. Sutton have now lost to three of the four unbeaten XVs. Next Saturday they host the other unbeaten side, Battersea Ironsides, who top the table.

Sutton and Epsom:

Michael Davies, Jack Briggs, Ross Parsons, Freddy Bunting ©, Max Russell, Gareth O'Brien, Chris Ballard, Tom Boaden, Jack Howes, Will Lloyd, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, George London, Rob Hegarty and Kean Orchard.

Replacements: Tariq Al Khaldi, Dan Jones and Alfie Baker. XXX

Old Reigatian: Sam Turner, Harrison Mitchell, Gareth Stephens, Tom Allen, Max Coyle, Conor Woods, Alex Skinner, Ciaran Lee, Ciaran Nestor, Toby Collister, Reilly Franklin-Talbot ©, Dan Grant, Seb Courteney-Walker, Finlay Lock and Oli Brooks.

Replacements: Ethan Monk, Sam Lenihan and Max Nichol.

Epsom's football team concede 4 goals

Epsom & Ewell FC 2 - 4 Sheerwater. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Saturday 16th September 2023.



Last week I wrote that our match against Sheerwater was likely to be a more telling indicator of where we are this season and whilst the football club may sugar coat things, I will be honest here as I always am and state what everyone else at the match was thinking, which is that we are now clearly in a relegation battle before the end of September as we shipped four goals to a team that hadn't scored one in the League for 341 minutes before this match in a truly disheartening 4-2 defeat.

Some people might say that the cup matches are important and we have done well in them this season so far, but our bread and butter is the League and four losses to start the season was not even close to the start we would have wanted. However, it could have been argued in our defence that we had played some good teams this season so far. Regrettably, all of those arguments went up in smoke as we faced a team as low on confidence as we were and still lost in this pivotal match.

There may have been mitigating circumstances. Our first choice back three that played only two weeks ago at Eastbourne United were all out of the starting line up as Callum Wilson and Zach Powell were not available, while Ash Snadden was sitting on the bench. In their places came Ollie Thompson, Nick Inwugwu and Reece Tierney and whilst all have been decent this season, this lack of consistency must have had a bearing on why we conceded four goals for the first time this season. Throw in a jittery performance from our keeper Harvey Keogh behind them and some indiscipline from Ethan Nelson-Roberts and Ade Batula who both found themselves in the sin-bin for unnecessary comments and this all contributed to a home defeat that leaves us in serious trouble at the foot of the table and in danger of being cut adrift.

With Captain and Vice-Captain absent, Chester Clothier took on the armband and in front of a disappointing attendance of 70, despite a perfect day for football we started fairly well. Batula was probably our best player and he made a good run on the ten minute mark which ended with a good pass over to Nelson-Roberts who chose to shoot high from an angle and sent the ball over Billy Wilson's crossbar.

A few minutes later Tommy Whitby sent a free kick over our bar, but Keogh then took his goal kick and passed it straight to an opposition striker just eighteen yards out! As he then ran in clear on goal, Keogh redeemed himself with a good save for a corner that fortunately came to nothing.

We recovered from this near fatal setback and started to create more with Batula prominent, playing more down the right than in his usual central role, but our momentum was checked when we lost Nelson-Roberts to the sin bin for comments he made. Clothier was protesting his teammate's innocence but the referee wasn't interested and off he went for a ten minute break.

Once we were back up to full strength though we had our best period of the game and Batula forced Wilson to tip over his strike from 20 yards. Although the subsequent corner was half cleared, the ball fell to Tommy Williams out on our left hand side who curled an unstoppable strike beyond Wilson and into the top corner via the far post to register an early candidate for goal of the season in the 36th minute.

We looked strong at this point which made the equaliser just seven minutes later a complete surprise to me. The most disappointing aspect was how easily the goal came about, as we appeared to think that a foul on Williams would be given, but the game was not stopped and a ball played out to the right found a player in space and his low ball in was swept past Keogh from just inside the penalty area into the far corner by Theo White. This was the visitors first goal for 384 minutes in League action and it had been so simple. There was no further action of note and the teams went off at the break with a goal each, but a feeling that we had missed our chance.

The second half started with some good interplay between Williams and Batula but the cross into the danger area was headed out. A minute later Batula fed the advancing Inwugwu just eight yards out but his touch let him down badly and the ball was cleared when we really should have had at least a shot on target. Regrettably Batula blotted his copybook when he made a sarcastic remark to the Assistant after being denied a throw in and found himself sitting down for ten minutes. Although Tino Carpena had a great chance in the 56th minute well blocked by Wilson while we were a man short, our opponents took the lead just sixty seconds later when Elliott York was put through on the left and he lifted the ball over Keogh to go 2-1 up.

The game drifted for a while, but with eleven men back on the field we secured the equaliser in the 73rd minute after Carpena won the ball just outside the area and he fed Jaan Stanley on the left whose delivery was side footed into the roof of the net from six yards by the unmarked Batula.

Just as it felt like we had got back into the match and were about to kick on for a winning goal, we were behind once again as a 75th minute free kick from White was met at the far post by the unmarked Rhys Paul who gave Keogh no chance from fairly close range and a minute later White tried his luck from 20 yards and the ball sailed into the roof of the net to make the score 4-2.

We had a couple of half chances as we tried to fight back with substitute Ben Amissh unlucky to see his near post header flick off a defender and drop just wide from a Kiyo Brown left wing cross and Wilson was down well to keep out a Brown drive, but the visitors had their moments too with Keogh doing well to keep out a close range effort at the near post.

We then had the very rare sight of a board advertising that six minutes of extra time would be played and in that period Batula



struck wide from a good position before Amissah headed a left wing cross just over the bar. The chances were gone and the final whistle confirmed a depressing score line.

Overall, and in terms of possession and chances you could argue that we were no worse than Sheerwater, who themselves were not that impressive, but we made enough errors, both mental and physical over the ninety minutes to say that we probably deserved what we got. It was interesting at full time to see the players holding an inquest on the field with all the Coaches and Management having walked away by that point. I'll be honest though, I don't think our squad is strong enough right now and it will be key to see whether we will have any new faces in the next week or two, because without any we are going to be in a big struggle for the rest of the season.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Tommy Williams, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Nick Inwugwu, Ollie Thompson, Reece Tierney, Ade Batula, Chester Clothier, Tino Carpena, Thompson Adeyemi, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Rory Edwards for Adeyemi (63), Ben Amissah for Carpena (77), Kiyo Brown for Stanley (77), Ash Snadden for Tierney (83), Ayran Kugathas for Williams (89)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Bullish performance beats the Salts

Jersey Bulls 2-0 Epsom & Ewell - Combined Counties League - Premier Division South - Saturday 9th September 2023.

Our fourth defeat from four League matches was maybe no real surprise for most Epsom supporters as Jersey Bulls defeated us by two goals to nil, even though our failure to register a shot of any concern to the home keeper was a little concerning. On a blisteringly hot day, the home side gradually wore us down and by the end we were a well beaten side, even though I thought we did a good job defensively for much of the match.

In front of an attendance advised as 533; low for Jersey, but in my opinion around a hundred above the actual number who were present, based on a less than half full stand that holds nearly a thousand, we took the field with a few changes from our loss at Eastbourne United. Ayran Kugathas came in for the suspended Tommy Williams, while Ollie Thompson started at the back ahead of Ash Snadden. Further forward Jaan Stanley returned to the starting eleven with Tino Carpena dropping to the bench.

It was Hawaiian day at Jersey and many of the supporters were wearing garlands presented in the Jersey fan zone that opened up before the match. However, there was little for our boys to celebrate and as the players "warmed up" (as if they needed to get warmer!) you could tell that this was going to be a difficult day against a team that passed the ball around for fun.

The first real action occurred in the seventh minute when Harvey Keogh was out quickly to block as a striker broke through. We won a corner at the other end but there was no one there to finish the delivery on after it was flicked on by a defender. Both sides had another opportunity inside the first twenty minutes as a good run by the Jersey number 11 finished with a shot dragged across goal, before a Rory Edwards corner was cleared at the near post, but only as far as Ethan Nelson-Roberts who struck the ball well enough, but it just cleared the Jersey bar. What we didn't realise at the time was that this would be our best chance of the match.

We had a scare in the 27th minute when a mis-hit shot spun up in the air, and Keogh then dropped it and we had a moment of panic in the six yard area before the danger was cleared. However, we were back on the attack soon after as Zach Powell sent a lovely pass through to Ade Batula on the right, who cut in only to see his shot blocked by a defender.

We had an unusual incident in the 33rd minute. Shortly after completing a five minute water break, the referee called a halt to proceedings once again and it transpired that he was struggling with his vision (insert joke here!), but fortunately a Jersey official was able to fill the breach on the line after one of the Assistants stepped up to take the whistle.

The game continued in a similar pattern with Jersey controlling much of the ball, and their number 10 struck at goal but it went high and in the direction of St Helier High Street with the only danger being to passers by outside the ground. On a more serious note we were beginning to concede some free kicks on the edge of the area and from one of these, the ball clipped the wall and forced Keogh into a fine save, tipping the ball over for a corner. For sure the danger signs were there at the half, but we managed to get in to the shade of the dressing room goalless.

Unfortunately, and much like the previous FA Cup match, we conceded early in the second half after another clumsy foul had conceded a free kick out on the Jersey left. The delivery was met with an unmarked header which Keogh kept out, but the ball fell to Adam Trotter around fifteen yards out and his shot went through a crowd of people into the net with Keogh either unsighted or



beaten by a deflection.

This was the signal for the drums and bells to start playing for a while as the previously quiet home support suddenly found their voice. In the carnival atmosphere Keogh kept out another low drive that was just creeping inside the post with his left leg and although we attacked with a good run from Kiyo Brown, his powerful looking shot had all the pace taken off it by a defender and it dribbled through apologetically to the keeper.

The hosts sent another header straight at Keogh midway through the second half as we began to get pushed back further and Powell picked up a yellow card to go with the one Batula had picked up at the start of the half. Fresh legs came on with Carpeno, Sirak Negassi, Nick Inwugwu and then Snadden all joined the action, but we were struggling to get out of our half as the Bulls seemed to be toying with us at times. Keogh made another flying full stretch save but in the 84th minute Edwards appeared to be cluttered in the middle of the park and we all stopped, expecting the free kick that never came and they nipped through to score their second goal through Le Quesne. It was the least they deserved, even if we shouldn't have switched off, but fortunately a few minutes later the torture was over. In fact this match was very similar in nature to the identical defeat we suffered on our previous visit in 2019.

Some of our Committee appeared rather over-disappointed by the result after the match, and some even expressed the view that the home side weren't that great, but they did more than enough to secure the win against us and you had the feeling that they had another gear or two if required. We have to be realistic about our ambitions this season and accept that sometimes the opposition are on a different level to us right now. That was definitely the case in this encounter and the only things we took home from Jersey were some garlands and a sun tan!

It could be said that four straight defeats to open the season is a poor start, but in our defence, we have played arguably two of the better sides in the division in Jersey and Redhill and were extremely unlucky to lose in the closing seconds at Fleet Town on the opening day, as a point gained there would have kept us off the foot of the table position we currently occupy. However, we do need to start picking up points soon and whilst I'm not that downhearted about our defeat on the Island, our next match at home to Sheerwater on Saturday is likely to be a much more telling indication of where we actually stand this season.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Ayran Kugathas, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Callum Wilson (c), Ollie Thompson, Zach Powell, Ade Batula, Chester Clothier, Jaan Stanley, Rory Edwards, Kiyo Brown

Subs: Tino Carpeno for Batula (57), Sirak Negassi for Kugathas (73), Nick Inwugwu for Powell (73), Ash Snadden for Clothier (78)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Beckenham Edge Extraordinary Encounter

Sutton and Epsom 41 - Beckenham 42. It was a case of polar opposites on the opening Saturday for this weekend's combatants as the hosts began the campaign with an away defeat at Reeds whilst the visitors got off the mark with a thrilling 36-31 home win against London Cornish. **Sutton and Epsom** had not had the pleasure of hosting the Kent club since their 28-8 victory in November 2013. The Black and Whites gave debuts to starting prop Callum Gibson whilst utility back Jack Briggs began on the bench. In marked contrast evergreen George London returned to the colours to make his 187th appearance. The match surpassed even the weather in terms of being unexpected and eleven tries later Beckenham won by a solitary point as the scoreboard read 42-41.

The Rugby Lane crowd palavered peacefully onwards from the clubhouse into the unclouded jollity of the afternoon to witness the Class of 2023-4 open their domestic account. The thermometer told of testing temperatures in the 90s and the challenging conditions were certain to be a factor in proceedings. Freddy Bunting kicked off for the hosts. The first opportunity was given to the visitors as Sutton strayed offside to give Lewis Bunton a simple penalty to put Beckenham on the scoreboard, 3-0, in the third minute. Sutton and Epsom replied in kind moments later as Freddy Bunting equalised with a penalty of his own for 3-3. The Bunting boot then set up a great opportunity with a fabulous 50 20 kick. An ensuing quickly taken penalty by Chris Ballard had the Black and Whites under the posts. Will Lloyd went close before it went wide for Gareth O'Brien to jink his way over. Freddy Bunting added the simple conversion for a 10-3 lead.

The next sortie to the Kent 22 resulted in a second Sutton goal. Michael Bennion made a break and Max Russell kept it alive before it was switched to the right. Gareth O'Brien then glided in untouched under the posts from 30 metres for his second try. Freddy Bunting did the necessary for 17-3 and the players enjoyed a much needed official hydration break. With thirsts slaked and suitably revitalised the boys from Balmoral Avenue swept into the home 22 and won a penalty five out. They set up the lineout



and though their catch and drive faltered they were awarded another penalty. A quick tap and a powerful burst saw Jamaican international Rimarni Richards score. The conversion drifted wide but Beckenham had reduced the deficit to 8-17. The Black and Whites immediately extended their lead, though Michael Bennion's dummy went unsold, the ball was recycled, George London stooped to take a pass on the half-volley then made light of the attentions of the visitors' defence to relentlessly power on and touch down from 20 metres. Freddy Bunting bisected the uprights and Sutton and Epsom had clear water at 24-8 approaching the half hour mark.

That clear water was to be the high water mark for the hosts as their ascendancy was alarmingly transformed by a stunning Kent comeback. It was not so much a turning of the tide but a tectonic shift of seismic proportions. A careless penalty at the restart gifted Beckenham an opportunity from a 5-metre lineout. They executed their process to perfection as former skipper Liam Markey flopped over. Despite the conversion failing they were on their way back at 13-24. It was the visitors' turn to err at the restart, not only kicking out on the full but also following up by giving away a penalty. Sutton and Epsom opted for the kick to the corner rather than through the uprights but the gamble did not pay dividends. Moments later at the other end the men from Balmoral Avenue were more clinical as they won their lineout and a bullocking run by Rimarni Richards crossed the whitewash. On this occasion Lewis Bunton added the extras for 20-24. As a disbelieving home crowd dropped their remarks into the understanding air there was one more twist, or perhaps dagger to the heart, before the half-time whistle. Dan Hamilton gathered a loose ball in his own half and he sprinted by the grandstand with no one ahead of him. Desperate cover closed him down but a wonderful support run by Lewis Bunton saw the 10 score. He added the conversion and the visitors turned around 27-24 to the good to end a jaw-dropping half of rugby.

It was hard to know if the incarnadine faces of the Sutton players were from the heat or their embarrassment. The Kent team continued the second period where they left off in the first. Within moments Lewis Bunton had added another penalty for a 30-24 lead. From the restart the catch was run back 50 metres and soon followed try number five with a strong finish on the flank by winger Stefan Linton. The touchline conversion failed but Beckenham were 35-24 ahead with 27 unanswered points. At this stage the visitors looked to be favourites to continue their hot streak and run up a cricket score. However, the pendulum swung back in favour of the Black and Whites.

A positive carry by debutant Callum Gibson offered Sutton some respite with a penalty. Captain Bunting steadied the ship and ended the drought to close the gap to 27-35. Better was to come to raise the spirits of the Rugby Lane crowd. A desperate kick and chase by Max Russell led to a 5-metre penalty. Sadly Max Russell showed all the circumspection of the Gadarene swine with the same result as the Biblical beasts as his quick tap gave away possession. Fortunately for Sutton and Epsom they soon got a penalty that reduced Beckenham to 14 men as Mr Duncan Butler-Wheelhouse issued a yellow card to captain Hans Laud-Anderson showing no empathy towards a fellow double-barrelled man. More woe fell upon the visitors as Ewan McTaggart emerged from a pile of players with a try from the 5-metre lineout to secure an Sutton and Epsom bonus point. Freddy Bunting converted expertly from the touchline to make it a one-point game with Beckenham 35-34 ahead.

It was time for the final official water break and cool heads were certainly at a premium as the game entered the final quarter. Sutton started to play with fluency, the tackling improved, turnovers were being won and the set scrum was secure. The Black and Whites regained the lead with their best team try of the afternoon. Multiple phases had Callum Gibson, Max Russell and Ciaran Mohr make gains and it was left to the vastly experienced George London to force his way over from close-range for his brace. Freddy Bunting once more converted from touch to lead 41-35 leaving Beckenham searching for a goal in the last ten minutes as a try would not suffice.

A spectacular finish ensued as the tension led to errors. Kicks went out on the full, balls were dropped and penalties neutered attacks. Then with the game in time added on the visitors had the chance to kick a penalty into the corner. Could they once again score from a 5-metre lineout? The ball was secured but the drive was held and anxious moments passed until a shrill blast of the whistle. Everyone expected a try but a penalty try was a surprise to those seeking shelter from the sun in the grandstand. Instead of a very challenging conversion from the flank Beckenham had an automatic 7-point score and had regained the lead 42-41. Surely that was the end of the drama.

With noteworthy game management the visiting pack controlled the restart. Slowly and steadily they advanced to the Sutton 22 and the Sutton and Epsom defence dared not concede a penalty but were desperate for a turnover. Unexpectedly Beckenham gave away a penalty and offered the hosts a lifeline. It was advanced by Bunting's boot to halfway. The lineout was secured and the endgame began. The ball went wide and the Kent territory was entered. Then the ultimate drama as Sir awarded the hosts a penalty. It was Captain Bunting who had to go to the well once more and attempt another kick from the touchline. The ball soared over the height of the uprights but inches wide and the final whistle blew. Beckenham had triumphed 42-41 and the Black and Whites had the consolation of two bonus points.

Both teams had moments of dominance but also had periods they would want to forget. It was cruel that the brilliant place-kicking of Freddy Bunting was not rewarded by one last successful strike to add to the previous magnificent seven. The Sutton



scrum was a source of strength, Gareth O'Brien sidestepped his way to two tries and veteran George London also doubled up with forceful scores. Equally Beckenham had their standout performers with the powerful carrying of prop Rimarni Richards being rewarded with two tries, Dan Hamilton was central to the comeback and their lineout converted the chances they were provided with remorseless efficiency.

Next Saturday, 16th September, the charabanc will be heading to Geoffrey Knight Fields for a fixture with Old Reigatian. OR have opened their campaign with an impressive 33-7 home win against Sidcup before a 36-26 winning trip to London Cornish in round 2. Meanwhile the Black and Whites will hope it will be third time lucky as they search for their first win.

Sutton and Epsom: Michael Bennion, Max Russell, Ross Parsons, Freddy Bunting ©, Ciaran Mohr, Gareth O'Brien, Chris Ballard, Will Lloyd, Chris Farrell, Callum Gibson, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, George London, Rob Hegarty and Kean Orchard. Replacements: (all used) Tom Boaden, Jack Howes and Jack Briggs.

Beckenham: Luke Bosch, Stefan Linton, Dan Hamilton, Matt Lovell, Tom Bateman, Lewis Bunton, Ben Murphy, George Baker, Lamar Sinclair, Rimarni Richards, Ciall Kirwan, Josh Hiscott, Liam Markey, Tom Ward, Hans Laud-Anderson . Replacements: (all used) Rob Willden, Olly Stapleton and Sami Suliman.